



## Press Clipping Article

**Title:** Tobacco enlisted to make vaccine - U of L joins \$1 million project

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**Writer:** Laura Ungar

**Lead:**

Researchers hope to use tobacco, a known cause of cancer, to help prevent the deadly disease.

### Article:

FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Researchers hope to use tobacco, a known cause of cancer, to help prevent the deadly disease.

The University of Louisville announced a partnership yesterday with the Owensboro Medical Health System that would allow researchers to use tobacco plants to develop medications -- including a cheaper version of a vaccine targeting a sexually transmitted virus that causes 70 percent of cervical cancer cases.

The Owensboro-based partnership will cost \$1 million to start, with each partner paying half. It will initially employ three researchers, with a goal of attracting 10, in addition to 40 other staff members.

"We're extremely excited about the project, which is, to our knowledge, the only one of its kind in the world," said Donald Miller, director of U of L's James Graham Brown Cancer Center. "We believe, in a state that has a disproportionate share of suffering from cancer, that this helps fulfill our mission."

The announcement at the State Capitol in Frankfort was timed to precede Owensboro Night but also fell on the day a legislative committee voted to send to the House a controversial bill that would require middle-school girls to get the vaccine.

U of L researchers A. Bennett "Ben" Jenson and Shin-je Ghim helped invent that vaccine, called Gardasil, which costs \$360 for three shots. They are now helping develop the second-generation vaccine, which would be much more accessible to developing countries, which shoulder the burden of the disease worldwide.

Last year, the researchers said they hoped the new version would cost only \$6 to \$8 for the three shots.

Jenson and Ghim will collaborate with U of L researchers Kenneth Palmer and Keith Davis, experts in plant biotechnology already based in Owensboro. The process involves inserting

genes needed for vaccine development into a virus that grows in tobacco plants, or directly into the tobacco genome, university officials said.

The plants' leaves are then harvested and purified to get the vaccine ingredient.

The partnership also will spawn other plant-made drugs. "I think we'll have a wide variety of opportunities," Miller said. "It may help us to make things that will be difficult to make in other ways."

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